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Written Testimony of John Murphy on behalf of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group

in Support of Senate Bill 205, AN ACT REQUIRING THERMOSTAT MANUFACTURERS

TO PAY INCENTIVES FOR THE RETURN OF MERCURY THERMOSTATS

Dear Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, and honorable members of the Environment Committee, my name is John Murphy and I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the nearly 30,000 member families of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG) who work for social, economic, racial and environmental justice for 40 years. CCAG strongly supports Senate Bill 205, AN ACT REQUIRING THERMOSTAT MANUFACTURERS TO PAY INCENTIVES FOR THE RETURN OF MERCURY THERMOSTATS.

CCAG was the lead organization in Connecticut in passing our Bottle Bill decades ago, which played and continues to play an important role in cleaning up our environment. People noticed the tangible benefits right away because you could see less litter and broken glass in our neighborhoods, in our parks and alongside our roads. However, mercury pollution is a much harder danger to see. CCAG is very concerned about the dangers of mercury in our air, water and food supply. One thing we have control over and have failed to do is to require product manufacturers to collect and recycle the majority of end-of-life mercury thermostats.

In 2002, the Connecticut General Assembly rightfully passed a comprehensive mercury products bill which phased out the sale of mercury-containing products. Products containing greater than one gram of mercury (including thermostats) were banned for sale after July 1, 2004. The General Assembly passed this bill because mercury is a highly toxic and persistent element and exposure at even a low level causes damage to the nervous system both in developing fetuses and in growing children. Scientists at the Environmental Protection Agency estimate that 1 in 6 women of childbearing age in the United States have unsafe mercury levels in their bodies. This translates to over 630,000 babies born at risk for mercury exposure annually. We must do a better job of protecting our children.

There are over 1,700,000 mercury thermostats in Connecticut homes; each contains between three to five grams of mercury. That means that Connecticut mercury thermostats contain over 11,500 pounds of mercury. A single gram of mercury is enough to contaminate a 20 acre lake, rendering fish unsafe to eat and causing serious health and ecological problems.

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This has led to multiple warnings for pregnant women and children to avoid eating fish. A good number of CCAG member families enjoy fishing and lament the fact that they cannot eat the fish they catch with their children and grandchildren because of high mercury levels as they once did with their parents and grandparents when they were growing up. We should not be allowing our environment to be polluted this way.

Mercury thermostats were built to last about 30 years. As they reach their end-of-use, or are replaced by modern programmable thermostats that save the homeowner money on fuel, where does the mercury end up? Voluntary recycling programs for thermostats average 5% annually. The other mercury thermostats end up in landfills where they are often burned, releasing mercury into the atmosphere. Information on how to properly recycle mercury on the Internet and especially the CT.gov portal, is indirect and confusing. This is not acceptable – Connecticut can and should do better.

Senate Bill 205 in the CT State legislature would require manufacturers to finance a collection and recycling program and pay a \$5 incentive for each mercury thermostat returned for proper recycling. Similar laws passed in Maine and Vermont increased the recycling of mercury thermostats by a factor of 10. Connecticut needs to step up and do all it can to require manufacturers to step up and dramatically increase their collection rates of mercury thermostats for recycling in a safe and responsible way.

Since exposure at even low levels causes damage to children and fetuses, it is crucial that we do all we can to prevent further leakage of mercury from old mercury thermostats in landfills. We know that Senate Bill 205 is a common sense workable solution to remove mercury from Connecticut's environment. CCAG urges the Environment Committee and the Connecticut General Assembly to pass Senate Bill 205 this year and keep future generations and our waters safe! Thank you for your consideration.

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